

Guest Preacher - Rev. Hugh Ferrier

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Preacher: Rev. Hugh Ferrier

- [0 : 00] Well, friends, would you turn with me, please, to the words we read there in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 11, Matthew chapter 11, and reading again verse 28. Matthew chapter 11, verse 28, where Jesus says, When I was ministering in the north coast, there was a man in the congregation named Colin.
- Colin had been a presenter and a lay preacher for many years, for many decades, but he was now quite elderly and he was becoming increasingly frail. But he still loved the Lord and he loved being with the Lord's people.
- And one day I was visiting him and I asked him what he would preach on if he could preach one last time. And without any hesitation, Colin replied, Come to me, all who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest.
- And ever since then, I've often thought that that is probably the text that I would choose to preach on if I knew that I had one last opportunity to preach.
- One last sermon to preach. Ray Ortlund says that we find the Gospel summarized in these five words from the lips of Jesus. That is the essence, the core of the Gospel.
- [1 : 31] Jesus saying, I will give you rest. Well, today we're going to look at the verses that we read under two headings, the Revelation and then the rest.
- The Revelation and the rest. First we have the Revelation and you see that in verses 25 to 27, where Jesus speaks about the Revelation that he provides.
- The Revelation that he provides. Before proceeding, we can note what has taken place. Matthew has just recorded the disbelief that Jesus encountered. He had been going through the cities at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee.
- And as he had done so, he had been doing mighty works. And these mighty works pointed to the fact that he was the Messiah who was coming with the kingdom of God, ushering in the kingdom of God.
- But he had been met with unbelief, a persistent refusal to repent and believe in him. And Matthew went on to record the denunciation that Jesus pronounced.
- [2 : 34] He had called out the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum and had said that they would be brought down to hell. He had told them that the pagan cities of Tyre and Sidon would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes if they had seen his mighty works.
- And he had told them that it would be more tolerable, more bearable for the land of Sodom than for them on the day of judgment. That is how seriously Jesus takes unbelief, where great spiritual privileges, great gospel privileges, have been consistently and repeatedly resisted and ignored and rejected.
- And having noted what has taken place, we hear the prayer that Jesus offers. Look at verses 25 and 26. We can see when Jesus prayed. Beginning in verse 25, Matthew tells us that Jesus chose to pray at that time.
- As soon as he has encountered the unbelief of those northern cities and pronounced judgment on them, Jesus chooses to pray. We can also see who Jesus prayed to.

He addresses the Lord of heaven and earth, the creator and sustainer of the whole universe. And Jesus addresses him as Father, highlighting and indicating that there is a close relationship between them.

[4 : 03] And we can see what Jesus prayed about. He thanks his Father, he praises his Father, and he praises his Father for hiding these things from the wise and the understanding.

These things refers to the significance of the mighty works that Jesus had been doing. And Jesus says that his Father has hidden these things.

He has concealed these things from the wise and the understanding, those who boasted about their scriptural knowledge, their intellectual knowledge.

And then Jesus praises his Father for revealing these things to little children. That word little children or infants refers to those who are poor, at least by the world's standards, those who are uneducated, those who appear to have nothing to offer.

And Jesus says that the Father has revealed these things. He has disclosed these things to these little children. And Jesus says that it was the Father's gracious will to do so.

[5 : 06] We move from the prayer that Jesus offers to the proclamation that he makes, verse 27. Jesus now turns to those who are with him. He stops praying.

And he tells them about his authority. He has just said that his Father is the Lord of heaven and earth, the one who is sovereign over the whole universe. And he now says that all things have been handed over to him by his Father.

In other words, Jesus possesses unique, unparalleled, unprecedented authority. And Jesus continues by speaking about his relationship with his Father.

He says that no one knows the Son except the Father. And then he says that no one knows the Father except the Son. Jesus is making the point that there is a closeness.

There is a relationship between him and his Father that no one else has. They have an intimate knowledge of one another. They have an infinite knowledge of one another.

[6 : 11] They have an incomprehensible knowledge of one another. And Jesus closes by saying that he's the one who reveals his Father. He has just said that no one knows the Father except the Son.

He now says that the Son reveals the Father to those whom he chooses. Throughout the Old Testament, we see that God is made known. God is revealed in different ways.

He is made known through the sacrifices that are offered to him. He is made known through the songs that are sung about him. He's made known through the prophets who speak for him.

And he's made known through the mighty deeds that are done by him. But here is Jesus, and he's claiming to be the one who provides the final revelation of God, the definitive revelation of God.

Jesus is saying here that no one really knows what God is like. No one can truly know God unless Jesus makes him known, unless Jesus reveals him.

[7 : 15] Now, friends, as we consider these verses, we're being presented with the great claim that Jesus makes. The great claim that Jesus makes.

That's what we see in Matthew 11. Here's Jesus, and he addresses his Father as Lord of heaven and earth. And he says that no one knows the Son except the Father.

And then he adds that no one knows the Father except the Son, and those whom the Son chooses to reveal him. And Jesus goes as far as to say that all things have been handed over to him by his Father.

That is the great claim that Jesus makes. And that's important to reflect on. There's a story about Muhammad Ali.

Muhammad Ali, the great boxer, the famous boxer, the best boxer in the world at the time. And he famously described himself, I'm sure you know, as the greatest.

[8 : 20] And one day Muhammad Ali was on a flight, on a plane, and the air stewardess came up to him, and she told him to put on a seatbelt. And Muhammad Ali, the man who was the best boxer in the world, quipped, Superman don't need no seatbelt.

And the air stewardess smiled and shot back, Superman don't need no airplane either. Muhammad Ali's great claim was quickly and easily dismissed.

Now, friends, the gospel presents us with a Jesus who makes great claims about himself. Here in Matthew 11, he says that all things, all authority has been handed over to him by his Father.

Then in Matthew 28, following his salvation securing death, and death defeating resurrection, he appears to the disciples, and what does he say to them?

He says, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, and the rest of the New Testament writers affirm, and reaffirm, and repeat, and emphasize that great truth.

[9 : 32] We can think especially of Paul's words to the Ephesians, where Paul says in Ephesians 1, And so, friends, with this great claim before us, having been confronted with Jesus' unique authority, we are now required to listen to and to act on what he says in the remainder of these verses.

You see, friends, these verses, these words, are not the words of a mere man. These aren't the words of Hugh Ferrier. These aren't the words of some other person.

These are the words of Jesus, the one who has all authority, and you and I, friends, are required to listen to and to act on what he says.

Not to sleep through what he says. Not to drift off through what he says. Not to think about our Sunday lunch through what he says. But to listen and to act on what he says.

And so, this brings us to our second point, and that is the rest. Verses 28 to 30. Where Jesus now speaks about the rest that he offers.

[11 : 06] The rest that he offers. Verse 28, we hear the exhortation. Jesus begins with a command. Look at the beginning of verse 28. He addresses all those who labor and are heavy laden.

Some suggest that Jesus is speaking here to people who are overwhelmed, overburdened with life's difficulties. But that doesn't really do justice to the wider context of Matthew's gospel.

If you go to Matthew 23, Jesus pronounces a series of woes on the scribes and the Pharisees, the religious teachers of his day. And he denounces them because they have been placing heavy burdens on the people.

They have been giving the people rules and regulations to follow if they want to know the favor of God. And here in Matthew 11, Jesus addresses those who are longing to know God's blessing and benediction, God's smile and salvation, God's favor and forgiveness, God's pardon and peace.

But they're currently weighed down by all the rules, all the regulations that the Pharisees and other religious teachers have been giving them.

[12 : 21] Saying to them, do this and you will earn God's salvation. Do this and you will merit God's favor. And it was a heavy burden on them.

And so Jesus appeals to them to simply come to him. He doesn't tell them to go to a pastor or a priest or a professor or a psychologist.

He doesn't tell them to go to a place or embark on a pilgrimage. He doesn't tell them to enroll on a program or make up a plan for improving themselves.

Instead, he simply tells them to come to him, engage with him, deal directly with him. And having presented that command, Jesus presents the consequences if it is followed.

Look again at verse 28. He says that he will give all who come to him rest. He literally says, I will rest you. Now, if you go back to Jeremiah chapter 31, hundreds of years earlier, you find God speaking to his people.

[13 : 31] And he says that he is going to turn mourning into joy. And that he is going to satisfy the weary souls. And he is going to replenish the weary souls.

And now, hundreds of years later, here in Matthew 11, you've got Jesus saying that every person who comes to him will know rest and replenishment, refreshment and renewal.

He's saying that all who come to him will know God's blessing and benediction, God's pardon and peace, God's favor and forgiveness, God's salvation and smile. What a word, wasn't it, for those who are breaking under all the rules of the Pharisees and the scribes, who are desperately trying to make themselves right before God.

And Jesus turns it all on it said, and he says, you come to me, and I, and I alone will give you rest. We move though from that exhortation to the expansion, verses 29 to 30, where Jesus presents another command, verse 29, he says that all who come to him are to take up his yoke.

Now, the yoke was an instrument that would often be placed on cattle, on oxen, on beasts of burden, to help them pull a plow, or pull a cart, or pull a carriage.

[14 : 58] By Jesus' day, the yoke had become a metaphor for submission, a metaphor for service, even a metaphor for slavery. Jesus is saying here that every person who comes to him, must come under his authority, must enter his service, must submit to him, must take up his yoke.

And he goes further, and he says that they are to learn from him. Throughout Matthew's gospel, Matthew highlights the teaching of Jesus. He gives five discourses that Jesus gave, beginning with the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters 5 to 7, and concluding with the Olivet Discourse, in Matthew 24 and 25.

But here in Matthew 11, Jesus doesn't tell his hearers what they're to learn. He simply tells them who they're to learn from. They're to learn from, not the scribes, not the Pharisees, Pharisees, but from him.

And having presented that command, Jesus provides a word of comfort. Look at verse 29 and 30. Jesus has just said that all who come to him are to submit to his authority.

They're to submit to his word. Let him direct the whole course of their lives. Let his word direct everything they say, everything they do, everything that they think.

[16 : 28] And he now says here, that he, the one whom they come to, is gentle and lowly in heart. You know, friends, this is the only time that we hear Jesus explicitly talking about his heart.

The core of his person. The center of his person. And he says here that he is gentle, meek, understanding in heart.

And he says that his heart is lowly. It is humble. It is accessible. And he goes even further and he says that those who take up his yoke and learn from him will find rest for their souls.

If you go back to Jeremiah chapter 6, again hundreds of years earlier, God speaks to the people of Jerusalem. And he says to them, stand by the roads and look.

Ask for the ancient paths where the good way is and walk in it. And you will find rest for your souls. But we know how it worked out for Jerusalem.

[17 : 39] We know that Jerusalem didn't walk in the ancient paths. We know that Jerusalem didn't walk in the ways that the Lord wanted them to walk in. And we know that Jerusalem forfeited the Lord's blessing as their city was destroyed, devastated, desolated by the Babylonian empire.

But now, Matthew 11, hundreds of years later, Jesus is saying that all those who come to him and submit to him who walk in the paths that he lays out will find that rest for their souls.

And after saying all this, Jesus closes by saying that his yoke is easy. That word easy can mean pleasant. It can mean kind. And he says that his burden is light.

Now, friends, as we consider these verses, we're not just presented with the great claim that Jesus makes, but the glorious call that Jesus issues.

That's what we see here in Matthew 11. Here's Jesus, and he's addressing all those who are weary and heavily laden as they attempt to win and earn and merit the favor of God.

[18 : 52] And Jesus appeals to them to come to him. And he assures them that if they come to him, he will give them rest.

That is the glorious call that Jesus issues. And again, that's important for us to reflect on. When I was a teenager, I played a lot of football. And this is how it worked in Alness and Invergordon.

It might have been a bit different on the west side, probably not, but this is how football worked in Alness and Invergordon. The person whom the ball belonged to and the best player would be appointed the team captains.

And they would take turns picking the team, beginning with the very best and descending all the way down to the very worst. And at the end of this harrowing process, one player would be left.

And he would be told to either be the goalkeeper or to stay in his own half and no one would pass to him. He wasn't good enough and no one wanted him. Now, friends, the gospel is so different, isn't it?

[19 : 53] where it presents us with a Jesus who calls anyone and everyone to come to him. Matthew 11, Jesus says, Come to me, all who weary and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest.

John chapter 6, Jesus says, I am the bread of life, and whoever comes to me shall not hunger, whoever believes in me shall never thirst, and I will never cast any who come to me away.

Matthew, John chapter 7, Jesus says, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. The only qualification that Jesus seeks is that a person senses their need.

Jesus is looking for people who are longing to know the blessing of God, the benediction of God, the favor of God, the forgiveness of God, the peace of God, the pardon of God, and who know that they cannot earn this themselves, who know that they do not deserve this, and he says, Come.

Come to me. Reortland puts it this way. If you feel successful, in control, and on top of it all, you're disqualified.

[21 : 14] But if you feel tired, exhausted, disappointed, you're the one Jesus wants. Who are those who are laboring and heavily laden? People with baggage. People with a past.

People lugging around regrets. Parents who wish they'd raised their children better. Husbands and wives who wish they'd never gotten married. Young people who fear they've ruined their chance at life.

Older people haunted with remorse. People who are sexually confused. People who have failed. People searching for truth. People who can never relax because they know what they're capable of.

We are the ones Jesus wants and is personally inviting in. And so today, friend, I just ask the question, have you come to Jesus?

And are you keeping on coming to Jesus? Jesus? You might be here today and you're not a Christian. And I want to urge you today, friend, to come to Jesus because He is calling you in the gospel to do so.

[22 : 19] And you can stop with all the excuses of saying, what if I'm not predestined? What if I am predestined? Stop with the excuses. Jesus says in the gospel, come to me.

Come to me. Or you might be here today, friend, and you are a Christian. But you've been wandering. You've been drifting. You've become wayward.

You're backslidden. You're even thinking to yourself, why on earth am I in this church today? There's no way back for me. And Jesus says to you, friend, come to me.

Come to me. Don't remain in that little rut that you've got yourself into. Don't remain in that backslidden pond that you've sunk into. Come to me.

Or you might be here today, friend, and you've been faithfully going on with Jesus for many years, many decades, and I just want to urge you today to keep on coming to him.

[23 : 17] This month marks the 20th anniversary since my mom's father passed away. He was 83, and he had been a free church member and free church elder for decades.

Decades. But he was now losing his battle with cancer. And on the very last day in this world, his daughters stood at his hospital bed as he recited Horatius Boner's old hymn to himself and to them.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, Come unto me and rest. Lay down, O weary one, lay down thy head upon my breast. I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad.

I found in him a resting place and he has made me glad. I heard the voice of Jesus saying, I am this dark world's light. Look unto me, your morn shall rise and all your day be bright.

I looked to Jesus and I found in him my star, my sun. And in that light of life I'll walk till travelling days are done. And six hours later his travelling days were done.

[24 : 31] The Lord's people never, never, never stop needing to come to him until he comes for them. So I ask you the question again today, friend.

Have you come to Jesus? Jesus? And are you keeping on coming to Jesus? But you know, as we consider these verses, we're not just shown the great claim that Jesus makes and the glorious call that Jesus issues, but also the gracious character that Jesus discloses.

Again, we see that here in Matthew 11. Here's Jesus and he appeals to all those who are weary and heavily laden to come to him. And he says that in coming to him they will be submitting to his authority over their whole lives.

And as he says this, he reminds them that he is the one who is gentle and lowly in heart. That is the gracious character that Jesus discloses.

And again, that's important for us to reflect on. I'm not sure if any of you are familiar with the film Chariots of Fire that depicts the true story of Eric Liddell, famous Olympic runner from Scotland refused to run on a Sunday.

[25 : 49] And there's a scene in the film Chariots of Fire where Eric Liddell's trainer Sandy, who's not converted, isn't a Christian, is in conversation with Eric's father after a church service.

And Eric's father says to Sandy, Sandy, the kingdom of God is not a democracy. The Lord never seeks re-election. There is no discussion, no deliberation, no referenda as to which road to take.

There is one right, one wrong, one absolute ruler. And Sandy doesn't like what he's hearing. And he sarcastically replies, a dictator, you mean. And Eric's father responds, aye, a dictator, but a benign and loving dictator.

You know, sadly, it can be all too common, can't it, to hear about people abusing positions of power, positions of authority, positions of influence that they've been given.

Maybe a position that they have in the home. Maybe a position they have in the school. Maybe a position they have in the workplace. Maybe even a position that they have in the church. But you will never see that in Jesus.

[27 : 02] He is entirely different. Dean Ortlund puts it like this. This, according to his own testimony, is Christ's very heart.

This is who Jesus is. Tender, open, welcoming, accommodating, understanding, willing. If we are asked to say only one thing about who Jesus is, we would be honoring Jesus' own teaching if our answer is gentle and lowly.

If Jesus hosted his own personal website, the most prominent line of the about me drop-down would read, gentle and lowly in heart.

That is who Jesus is. And so, friends, as we think about the gracious character of Jesus, I hope, friends, that we would all see it as an incentive not to hesitate and not to hold back from responding positively to the one who issues that glorious call.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest.

[28 : 17] That is who Jesus is, gentle and lowly in heart, and this is what he offers to anyone and everyone who comes to him.

Rest for their souls. And what good news that is for us to hear, isn't it, at the beginning of a new day, the beginning of a new week.

What a reason for us to go out of this building today with a smile on our faces, not having been told that we've been lambasted and told how dreadful we are, but rather that we would leave this building saying, we have seen the glories and grace of our Saviour Jesus.

Well, as we think about this, let's sing in response the words of Psalm 107, Psalm 107. The Scottish altar version is singing verses 1 to 9.

Praise God for he is good for still his mercy's last seen be. Let God's redeemed say so whom he from the enemies handed free, gathered them out off the lands from north, south, east, and west.

[29 : 22] They strayed in deserts pathless way, no city found to rest. And down to verse 9, Psalm 107, the Scottish sold her version on page 382. And if you're able to stand for this singing, please do so.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Praise God for he is good for still his mercy's lasting be.

Let God's name. Let God's redeem say so whom he from enemies are free.

And gather them out of the lands from north, south, east, and west.

They strayed in deserts pathless way, no city found to rest.

[30 : 36] For thirst and hunger in them fades, their soul and strays them rest.

They cry unto the Lord and he them frees from their distress.

Them also in a way to walk that right his he did guide, that they might to a city go, wherein they might abide.

! Oh, that men to the Lord would give grace for his goodness then, and for his words of wonder done,!

unto the sons of men. For he, the soul that long it is, doth fully satisfy, with goodness he, the hungry soul doth fill abundant and clear!

[32 : 40] Let's pray. Our God and our Father, our prayer as we prepare to leave this building now is that we would go away marvelling at your goodness to us in the gospel, that there wouldn't be a single person here today who would be resisting and rejecting that free and gracious offer that the Lord Jesus gave himself, where he said, come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

We thank you and bless you that he's the one who invites those who are struggling in this world to come, and he will give them the rest, the replenishment, the refreshment, the renewal, that only he and he alone can provide.

We do pray that we would leave this building marvelling at the glory, the wonder, the grace of our Saviour, and that we would have an incentive even tonight to come and engage in worship once more of his glorious and holy name.

Part us now with your blessing as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.